

Protecting Children from Online Exploitation and Abuse

The Internet and other communications technologies are increasingly used by sexual predators and abusers as tools for exploiting and victimizing our children. First, these technologies have contributed to a significant increase in the proliferation and severity of child pornography. They provide pornographers with an easily accessible and seemingly anonymous means for collecting and distributing a large number of images of child sexual abuse. Eventually, some offenders turn to producing their own images. The result has been that images of child sexual abuse today are more disturbing, more graphic, and more sadistic than ever before, and they involve younger and younger children. Second, as the Internet and related technologies have grown, children have become increasingly at risk of being sexually solicited online by predators. Law enforcement is uncovering an escalating number of “enticement” cases, where perpetrators contact children in chat rooms or through instant messaging and arrange to meet at a designated location for the purpose of making sexual contact. The Internet, for all of its good and valuable purposes, has become a tool for evil in the hands of those who seek to exploit and abuse our children.

Responding effectively to the threats of child pornography and enticement offenses demands a comprehensive effort. It requires a coordinated and robust response by law

enforcement at all levels. It also demands that non-law enforcement partners work together and with law enforcement in, among other things, raising public awareness of these dangers, educating parents and children about Internet safety, and working with victims of child exploitation.

President Bush is firmly committed to meeting these challenges and to protecting children from sexual exploitation. In October of 2002, President Bush remarked that, “in the hands of incredibly wicked people, the Inter-

net is a tool that lures children into real danger” due to online predators and the spread of child pornography. The President emphasized the central role that parents must play in protecting children. The President also reiterated the duty of law enforcement: “Our nation has made this com-

mitment: Anyone who targets a child for harm will be a primary target of law enforcement. That’s our commitment. Anyone who



President George W. Bush delivers remarks on Children’s Online Safety in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building on October 23, 2002.

White House photo by Paul Morse

“Protecting children from sexual exploitation is... a priority.”

President George W. Bush,
October 23, 2002

takes the life or innocence of a child will be punished to the full extent of the law.”

President Bush’s charge is clear: the Department of Justice, and its partners in federal, state, local, and tribal law enforce-

ment, must find these perpetrators and bring them to justice. This collaboration has already led to an unprecedented number of investigations and prosecutions for child pornography and enticement offenses, at all levels of law enforcement. The Department has also worked with its non-law enforcement partners throughout the nation to help educate the public about the dangers facing children, and to rescue and assist victims of child exploitation crimes.

But law enforcement must do even more to fulfill the President's commitment to protecting children from sexual exploitation. On February 15, 2006, in announcing his priorities for the Department, Attorney General Gonzales reiterated his commitment "to ensuring that there are fewer places on the Web where our children are in danger." The Attorney General announced Project Safe Childhood, a comprehensive initiative aimed at preventing the sexual exploitation of children facilitated by the Internet or other distribution technology. The Attorney General called on law enforcement at all levels to come together, coordinating their efforts in order "to be sure we keep these criminals away from our children." The law enforcement efforts should be complemented by community-wide campaigns to assist victims and raise awareness of the problems facing children. And he emphasized the critical role that parents must play:

"They are closest to the problem and can be a big part of the solution just by looking over their children's shoulders while they surf the Internet."

The Attorney General provided the basic vision of Project Safe Childhood and its components on February 15th. He and other Department leaders have consulted closely with partners in federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement, and in private and non-profit groups committed to this cause. This publication, released in conjunction with the Attorney General formally kicking off Project

Safe Childhood on May 17, 2006, is the result of those consultations, and it provides guidance to U.S. Attorneys and their partners on the elements of Project Safe Childhood and how to make this initiative a success. After explaining the need for Project Safe Childhood and describing the basics of the initiative, this publication provides practical guidance to U.S. Attorneys in

implementing Project Safe Childhood. In addition, in recognition of the fact that protecting our children requires a community-wide effort, this publication provides information and guidance on how non-law enforcement partners can get involved. In the appendices, a variety of resources are provided for use in implementing this initiative.



Alberto R. Gonzales marks his one-year anniversary as Attorney General by addressing Department employees in the Great Hall of the Department's Robert F. Kennedy Building on February 15, 2006.